

Comment on the proposed conservation of *Porites* Link, 1807, *Galaxea* Oken, 1815, *Mussa* Oken, 1815 and *Dendrophyllia* Blainville, 1830 (Anthozoa, Scleractinia)
(Case 2900; see BZN 52: 142–147)

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I am writing in support of Prof Donald Potts's application for the conservation of the scleractinian coral generic names *Porites* Link, 1807, *Galaxea* Oken, 1815, *Mussa* Oken, 1815 and *Dendrophyllia* Blainville, 1830.

I have been working on the taxonomy and related topics of scleractinian corals, especially those of living and fossil reefal forms, for 30 years. Fortunately, over this time there has been relative stability in the usage of most reef coral generic names, especially the most common ones, and I very much believe that this has been to the advantage of coral studies in general. Over this time the group has become recognized for its great ecological importance in tropical marine ecosystems, and its biogeography is now also one of the most thoroughly studied of all tropical marine groups of organisms.

Potts's case for the stability of the four coral names is an implicit plea for nomenclatural stability in modern science. One of the prime purposes of the taxonomist is to eliminate ambiguity of name usage, thereby enabling taxonomically-based research such as ecology, evolutionary studies and biogeography to be carried out with the minimum of nomenclatural confusion. I recognise that taxonomic changes result in name changes from time to time, but name changes should not be made purely for the sake of a legalistic application of the Code. If continuing nomenclatural stability rests on retaining names which are well founded and valid in themselves and threatened only on priority grounds as the result of researches in the antiquarian literature, then I would argue that stability must be overriding. Potts is evidently arguing from a similar point of view.

Potts emphasizes that all four genera are commonplace, widespread and ecologically important. They also have a substantial fossil record, most especially *Porites* which is often the primary, often sole, bioconstructional organism in Neogene reefs. *Porites* is probably the most common single genus in the coral record, taking fossil and extant occurrences into account. It has also become an important sclerochronological tool in climate change research. In short, '*Porites*' is the nearest in the coral world to a household name, rivalled only by *Acropora*. The colonies of *Galaxea* attain a larger size (several metres) than those of any other genus. The concepts of two of the genera, *Porites* and *Dendrophyllia*, are founded on validly designated lectotypes. All four corals, *Porites*, *Galaxea*, *Mussa* and *Dendrophyllia*, are distinctive and relatively easy to recognise by non-specialists, even in the field.

If Potts's application for the suppression of the unused senior homonym *Porites* Cuvier, 1798 were not approved, the name would remain valid, applied to one or other of the three genera now called *Galaxea*, *Mussa* or *Dendrophyllia* (para. 10 of the application). A new name would be required for the genus currently called *Porites*. It is difficult to see what would be gained from such a nomenclatural upheaval, made necessary purely on the grounds of priority. It would lead to enormous confusion for